



Struggle for Survival: A Comparative Study of the *Bridge of Beyond* and the *Old Man and the Sea*

Victor Terfa Atsaam

Department of Literary and Cultural Studies
Nigeria French Language Village, Badagry,
Lagos State.

victoratsaam@gmail.com

08029334623

Abstract

This article examines the theme of struggle for survival as a defining feature of American baroque culture through a comparative study of *The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway. Situated within the broader framework of transatlantic literary studies, the paper interrogates how distinct cultural contexts—Francophone Caribbean and Anglo-American—converge in their representation of survival as both a material necessity and an existential condition. Drawing on Alejo Carpentier's theory of the marvelous real and psychoanalytic criticism, the study argues that survival in American literature emerges from a complex interplay between historical trauma, cultural hybridity, and individual resilience.

The marvelous real, as conceptualized by Carpentier, reveals the extraordinary within lived reality, particularly in culturally syncretic spaces such as the Americas, where myth, history, and lived experience are inseparable. This study demonstrates that survival is not merely a thematic concern but a structural and aesthetic principle embedded in the narrative fabric of both texts. Using documentary and comparative methods, the analysis shows that the struggle for survival is articulated through baroque traits such as freedom, fantasy, extravagance, subversion, and oddity—features that reflect the instability and dynamism of American cultural formations.

Furthermore, the paper foregrounds the role of dualism as a literary and philosophical mechanism that juxtaposes opposing forces—life and death, hope and despair, strength and vulnerability—to dramatize the human condition. In both novels, survival is constructed through tensions between the individual and nature, the self and society, as well as the visible and invisible worlds. By bringing together these two seemingly disparate texts, the study fills a critical gap in comparative transatlantic literary scholarship, which has often treated Francophone Caribbean and Anglo-American literatures in isolation.

Ultimately, the article concludes that both novels exemplify how American literature fundamentally aligns with the aesthetics of the marvelous real, where survival becomes an enduring narrative of resistance, adaptation, and transformation within historically and culturally layered realities.

Keywords: struggle for survival, marvelous real, baroque, dualism, American literature

Introduction

The Americas represent a unique site of cultural convergence shaped by centuries of interaction among European, African, and Asian civilizations. This historical encounter, rooted in processes such as colonization, forced migration, slavery, and diasporic movements, has produced a profoundly hybrid cultural identity marked by linguistic plurality, social stratification, and artistic innovation. Across the continent, from the Caribbean to North America, this convergence has generated complex cultural formations that challenge singular narratives of identity and belonging. Consequently, literary production

in the Americas reflects not only diverse aesthetic traditions but also shared historical experiences of displacement, resistance, and survival.

The legacy of colonialism, slavery, and migration has contributed to a distinctive worldview that informs literary expression across American societies. Writers from these regions often grapple with themes of marginality, endurance, and transformation, foregrounding the human capacity to survive under conditions of systemic oppression and existential uncertainty. In this context, the struggle for survival emerges as a central thematic and structural concern, shaping both narrative content and form. It is within this historical and cultural matrix that the present study situates its analysis.

Alejo Carpentier's concept of the marvelous real provides a particularly compelling framework for understanding this cultural specificity. According to Carpentier, the marvelous is not a product of imaginative excess or artificial invention but is inherent in the lived realities of the Americas, where the convergence of histories, beliefs, and cultural practices produces an extraordinary sense of the real. This perspective challenges Eurocentric aesthetic norms and redefines reality as intrinsically layered, contradictory, and dynamic. The marvelous real thus becomes a lens through which the complexities of American existence—marked by both suffering and creativity—can be interpreted.

This theoretical orientation aligns closely with the baroque aesthetic, which is characterized by complexity, tension, multiplicity, and the coexistence of opposites. Often associated with excess, ornamentation, and dramatic contrasts, the baroque in the American context transcends its European origins to become a mode of cultural expression that reflects the fragmented yet interconnected realities of the New World. Within this framework, struggle for survival is not merely a narrative motif but a baroque expression of lived experience, shaped by contradiction, instability, and resilience.

While existing scholarship has examined *The Bridge of Beyond* within Caribbean postcolonial and feminist discourse, and *The Old Man and the Sea* within existentialist and modernist traditions, few studies have undertaken a comparative analysis of these texts through the combined lens of the marvelous real and baroque aesthetics. This absence points to a significant gap in transatlantic literary studies, where critical approaches often remain compartmentalized along linguistic and cultural lines. By bridging this divide, the present study contributes to a more integrated understanding of American literature as a heterogeneous yet interconnected field.

This article therefore seeks to:

1. Examine how struggle for survival functions as a baroque cultural expression within the American literary imagination.
2. Compare its representation in the works of Simone Schwarz-Bart and Ernest Hemingway, highlighting both convergences and divergences.
3. Demonstrate how dualism operates as a structuring principle that articulates survival across both texts, revealing deeper philosophical and psychological dimensions.

Through this approach, the study not only repositions the selected texts within a shared theoretical framework but also advances the discourse on comparative literature by foregrounding the interconnectedness of American cultural and literary traditions.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with the works of Simone Schwarz-Bart has predominantly been situated within the domains of postcolonial studies, gender discourse, and cultural memory. Critics such as Ormerod (115) and Toureh (93) underscore the centrality of ancestral heritage, collective memory, and matrilineal transmission in shaping Caribbean identity. These studies highlight how Schwarz-Bart's narrative universe foregrounds the lived experiences of women, particularly their resilience in the face of historical trauma, social marginalization, and cultural dislocation. The emphasis on feminine endurance is often interpreted as a counter-discourse to colonial erasure, where memory functions as both a repository of pain and a source of empowerment. Furthermore, scholars have drawn attention to the interplay between history and myth in her work, suggesting that her narrative strategy reflects a broader Caribbean epistemology grounded in hybridity and cultural syncretism.

In contrast, critical interpretations of *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway have largely revolved around existentialist philosophy, heroism, and the theme of individual endurance. As noted by Ali (51) and Sidram (49), the character of Santiago is frequently read as an embodiment of stoic perseverance, representing the human capacity to confront and endure both natural and existential challenges. Hemingway's minimalist style has also attracted significant critical attention, with scholars arguing that the apparent simplicity of the narrative conceals profound philosophical concerns about human dignity, isolation, and the inevitability of struggle. Within this critical tradition, Santiago's battle with the marlin and the sea is often interpreted as a metaphor for the human condition, where survival is not guaranteed but must be continually negotiated.

Despite the richness of these individual critical traditions, there remains a noticeable lack of comparative scholarship that brings these two authors into dialogue. While Schwarz-Bart's work is typically analyzed within Caribbean and Francophone frameworks, and Hemingway's within Anglo-American and modernist paradigms, few studies have explored the thematic and aesthetic intersections between them. This disciplinary separation has limited the possibility of uncovering shared cultural and philosophical concerns that transcend linguistic and geographic boundaries.

The theoretical contributions of Alejo Carpentier, particularly his concept of the marvelous real, have been extensively applied to Latin American literary texts. As Edwards, Hopkin, and Handley observe, this concept captures the "improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures" that characterize the historical and cultural realities of the Americas. However, its application has largely remained confined to Hispanic and Francophone contexts, with limited extension to Anglophone literature. This gap suggests an underexplored potential for the marvelous real to serve as a unifying analytical framework across different American literary traditions.

Thus, this study bridges three critical domains that have often been treated in isolation:

- Francophone Caribbean literature
- Anglo-American literature
- Latin American theoretical frameworks

By integrating these domains, the study contributes to the development of a more inclusive and transnational approach to American literary studies, foregrounding the interconnectedness of cultural experiences across the hemisphere.

Theoretical Framework (Expanded)

This study is anchored on two complementary theoretical paradigms that together provide a multidimensional understanding of the struggle for survival in American literature:

1. The Marvelous Real

The concept of the marvelous real, as articulated by Alejo Carpentier, serves as a foundational framework for this analysis. Carpentier posits that the marvelous is not an artificial or fantastical construct imposed upon reality but is intrinsically embedded within the historical, cultural, and geographical fabric of the Americas. This perspective challenges conventional distinctions between the real and the fantastic, suggesting instead that the lived experiences of American societies—marked by colonization, cultural convergence, and historical upheaval—naturally produce forms of reality that appear extraordinary.

As Edwards, Hopkin, and Handley argue, the marvelous emerges from "improbable juxtapositions and marvelous mixtures" inherent in the region's history and environment. This formulation is particularly relevant to the selected texts, where ordinary activities—such as fishing in Hemingway's narrative or the lived experiences of Caribbean women in Schwarz-Bart's work—are imbued with profound symbolic and existential significance. Through the lens of the marvelous real, these seemingly mundane experiences are reinterpreted as sites of struggle, transformation, and meaning.

Moreover, the marvelous real aligns closely with the baroque aesthetic, characterized by excess, multiplicity, contradiction, and the coexistence of opposites. In this sense, it provides a theoretical bridge for understanding how survival in both texts is not merely a physical act but a complex cultural and metaphysical process shaped by historical memory and imaginative reconfiguration.

2. Psychoanalytic Criticism

Complementing the marvelous real is the framework of psychoanalytic criticism, grounded in the theories of Sigmund Freud. Freud's tripartite model of the psyche—comprising the id, ego, and superego—offers a valuable lens for examining the internal dynamics that underpin characters' actions and experiences.

Psychoanalytic criticism seeks to uncover the unconscious motivations, desires, and conflicts that shape human behavior. In the context of this study, it enables a deeper exploration of how the struggle for survival operates not only at the external level of physical endurance but also within the psychological realm. The characters in both *The Bridge of Beyond* and *The Old Man and the Sea* are engaged in continuous negotiations between instinctual drives (id), rational decision-making (ego), and moral or societal expectations (superego).

For instance, Santiago's persistence in the face of exhaustion and failure can be interpreted as a manifestation of the ego mediating between the desire for triumph and the harsh realities of nature. Similarly, the experiences of Schwarz-Bart's characters reveal complex psychological tensions shaped by memory, trauma, and cultural expectations. Through this framework, survival emerges as an internal as well as external struggle, marked by conflict, repression, and resilience.

Together, these two theoretical approaches provide a comprehensive analytical lens that captures both the cultural and psychological dimensions of survival, enabling a nuanced interpretation of the selected texts.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative, comparative, and documentary approach in order to provide an in-depth and interpretative analysis of the selected literary texts. The qualitative nature of the study allows for a close reading of narrative structures, thematic patterns, and symbolic elements, while the comparative dimension facilitates the examination of similarities and differences between the two works within a unified analytical framework.

The primary texts—*The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway—constitute the core data for analysis. These are complemented by secondary sources, including critical essays, journal articles, and theoretical texts, which provide contextual and interpretative support for the study. The documentary aspect of the methodology ensures that the analysis is grounded in established scholarly discourse while also allowing for original interpretation.

The methodological procedure involves several interrelated steps:

- **Thematic Analysis:** The study identifies and examines the theme of struggle for survival as it manifests in both texts, paying attention to its narrative development and symbolic significance.
- **Comparative Textual Reading:** A systematic comparison is conducted to highlight convergences and divergences in the representation of survival, particularly in relation to cultural context, narrative technique, and character construction.
- **Theoretical Application:** The frameworks of the marvelous real and psychoanalytic criticism are applied to interpret the findings, enabling a multidimensional analysis that integrates cultural, philosophical, and psychological perspectives.

Through this methodological design, the study ensures analytical rigor and coherence, while also facilitating a comprehensive exploration of how survival is constructed and represented across different literary and cultural contexts.

Analysis and Discussion

1. Struggle for Survival as a Baroque Spirit

Baroque aesthetics emphasize contradiction, tension, multiplicity, and excess (Perret 156), and these qualities manifest powerfully in both *The Bridge of Beyond* by Simone Schwarz-Bart and *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway through the characters' continuous negotiation with hardship, instability, and existential uncertainty. In this sense, survival is not merely a thematic concern but an aesthetic condition shaped by the baroque spirit of complexity and contradiction that defines American cultural experience.

Freedom and Free Will

In Schwarz-Bart's narrative, freedom operates as a paradoxical force that simultaneously enables agency and generates suffering. The spatial and symbolic openness of Fond-Zombi reflects a form of unrestricted existence, yet this freedom is marked by moral ambiguity, vulnerability, and exposure to hardship (Schwarz-Bart 53). Telumee's endurance within marriage illustrates how freedom is not always liberatory; rather, it imposes the burden of choice and the responsibility to endure the consequences of those choices. From a psychoanalytic perspective, this tension reflects the conflict between desire and social constraint, where the ego must constantly mediate between the impulses of the self and the demands of lived reality. Similarly, Santiago in Hemingway's narrative embodies a form of existential freedom grounded in individual will and determination. His assertion—"A man can be destroyed but not defeated" (Hemingway 75)—captures the psychological and philosophical dimensions of survival, where dignity and meaning are constructed through resistance rather than outcome. This statement reflects a baroque tension between destruction and resilience, emphasizing that survival transcends physical success and resides in the assertion of human will against overwhelming odds.

Fantasy and Subversion

Fantasy in American literature, as Édouard Glissant argues, is not escapist but deeply rooted in historical trauma and cultural memory (Glissant 32). In Schwarz-Bart's work, the depiction of Guadeloupe as a space of hardship and suffering reflects what Glissant terms the "entanglement of negativities," where past and present forms of oppression intersect. The presence of mythic and symbolic elements within the narrative does not detach it from reality; rather, it intensifies the representation of lived experience, aligning with Alejo Carpentier's notion of the marvelous real.

In contrast, Hemingway's narrative, though often classified as realist, incorporates elements of symbolic exaggeration that subtly evoke the marvelous. The giant marlin and the relentless sharks transcend their literal roles to become symbolic forces representing aspiration, destruction, and the inevitability of loss. This infusion of symbolic intensity transforms the narrative into a space where reality acquires an almost mythical dimension, thereby reinforcing the baroque interplay between the ordinary and the extraordinary.

Extravagance and Oddity

Extravagance and oddity, as defining features of the baroque, manifest in both texts through the use of metaphor, myth, and symbolic characterization. In Schwarz-Bart's narrative, figures such as Queen Without a Name and Ma Cia embody forms of supernatural resilience and mystical knowledge that transcend ordinary human experience (Ormerod 111). These characters function as cultural archetypes, representing the continuity of ancestral wisdom and the capacity for survival within a context marked by historical trauma and social marginalization.

In Hemingway's text, extravagance emerges through the transformation of Santiago's triumph into apparent absurdity. The marlin, initially a symbol of victory and fulfillment, is ultimately consumed by sharks, reducing the tangible reward of Santiago's struggle to a skeletal remnant. This transformation reflects what Daniel Maximin describes as the convergence of "dream, madness and fable" (98), where the boundaries between success and failure become blurred. The result is a profoundly baroque representation of survival, in which meaning is derived not from material outcomes but from the intensity of the experience itself.

2. Dualism as a Structural Principle

Dualism operates as a central structural and philosophical mechanism in both texts, shaping the representation of survival through the juxtaposition of opposing forces (Maximin 118). This dualistic framework reflects the baroque emphasis on tension and contradiction, where meaning emerges from the interaction of conflicting elements.

- Colonizer vs. colonized (Schwarz-Bart)
- Youth vs. age (Hemingway)
- Hope vs. despair (both texts)

In *The Bridge of Beyond*, the experience of marital abuse is set against the enduring presence of ancestral wisdom, creating a tension between oppression and resilience. This duality reflects the broader postcolonial condition, where the legacy of domination coexists with cultural continuity and resistance.

The characters' survival depends on their ability to navigate these opposing forces, drawing strength from collective memory while confronting immediate realities.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago's physical defeat contrasts sharply with his moral and psychological victory. Although he returns with only the skeleton of the marlin, his struggle affirms his dignity and resilience, illustrating that survival is not defined by material success but by the capacity to endure and maintain one's sense of self. This dualism between external failure and internal triumph underscores the philosophical depth of Hemingway's narrative.

Thus, in both texts, survival emerges not as a resolution of conflict but as a continuous process shaped by the tension between opposing forces. It is within this dynamic interplay that the baroque spirit finds its fullest expression.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that the struggle for survival constitutes a central feature of American baroque culture, expressed through aesthetic and thematic elements such as freedom, fantasy, extravagance, and dualism. Through a comparative analysis of the works of Simone Schwarz-Bart and Ernest Hemingway, the research reveals that survival operates on multiple interconnected levels—physical, psychological, cultural, and symbolic.

Both authors illustrate that survival is not merely a biological imperative but a deeply complex process shaped by historical trauma, individual agency, and cultural memory. The application of Alejo Carpentier's concept of the marvelous real across these texts highlights the extent to which American literature, regardless of linguistic or regional differences, is grounded in an aesthetic that embraces contradiction, multiplicity, and transformation.

By situating these works within a shared theoretical framework, the study challenges the traditional compartmentalization of literary studies along linguistic and cultural lines. It demonstrates that Caribbean and North American literatures, though distinct in context, are united by a common engagement with the complexities of existence in the Americas. Ultimately, the study affirms that the aesthetics of the marvelous real provide a powerful lens for understanding how survival is narrated, imagined, and experienced within American literary traditions.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes several significant contributions to the field of literary studies:

1. **Theoretical Contribution:**
It extends the applicability of Alejo Carpentier's theory of the marvelous real beyond its traditional Latin American context to include Anglo-American literature. This expansion not only broadens the scope of the theory but also demonstrates its relevance as a transnational analytical tool.
2. **Comparative Contribution:**
The study bridges Francophone Caribbean and Anglo-American literary traditions, which are often examined in isolation. By placing the works of Simone Schwarz-Bart and Ernest Hemingway in dialogue, it fosters a more integrated understanding of American literature as a heterogeneous yet interconnected field.
3. **Conceptual Contribution:**
It reconceptualizes the struggle for survival as a baroque cultural expression rather than merely a recurring theme. This shift in perspective allows for a deeper appreciation of how survival is embedded within the aesthetic and structural dimensions of literary texts.
4. **Methodological Contribution:**
The study innovatively combines psychoanalytic criticism with postcolonial and baroque frameworks within a comparative model. This interdisciplinary approach enhances analytical depth and offers a model for future research in transnational literary studies.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed:

- Future research should extend the application of the marvelous real to other transatlantic and cross-cultural literary comparisons, particularly those involving underexplored intersections between African, Caribbean, and American texts.
- There is a need for more interdisciplinary approaches that integrate literary analysis with insights from history, psychology, anthropology, and cultural studies in order to capture the full complexity of survival narratives.
- Scholars should further examine African and diasporic literatures within baroque and marvelous frameworks, as these perspectives offer valuable tools for understanding the interplay between historical trauma, cultural hybridity, and creative expression.
- Additional studies may also explore the role of gender, memory, and ecological realities in shaping representations of survival, thereby expanding the scope of inquiry within this field.

Works Cited

- Ali, Arasin. *Free Will and Fate in The Old Man and the Sea*. MA thesis, University of Sulaiman, 2008.
- Bouchard, Monique. *Une lecture de Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*. Presses Universitaires, 1990.
- Carpentier, Alejo. "L'éternel retour du baroque." *Le Magazine Littéraire*, no. 300, 1992, pp. 27–30.
- Edwards, Erika, Arden Hopkin, and George Handley. "The Marvelous American Reality." *Journal of Undergraduate Research*, 2013.
- Glissant, Édouard. *Le Discours antillais*. Seuil, 1981.
- Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952.
- Maximin, Colette. *Littératures Caribéennes Comparées*. Karthala, 1996.
- Ormerod, Beverley. *An Introduction to the French Caribbean Novel*. Heinemann, 1985.
- Perret, Delphine. "Lire Chamoiseau." *Éds. Maryse Condé et Madeleine Cottenet-Hage*, Karthala, 1995, pp. 154–171.
- Sane, M. "Perseverance and Determination in The Old Man and the Sea." *International Journal of Science and Humanities Invention*, vol. 12, no. 6, 2025, pp. 8640–8643.
- Schwarz-Bart, Simone. *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*. Seuil, 1972.
- . *The Bridge of Beyond*. Translated by Barbara Bray, Heinemann, 1982.
- Sidram, S. "The Struggle for Survival in The Old Man and the Sea." *AIIRJ*, June 2024, pp. 48–50.
- Toureh, Fanta. *L'imaginaire dans l'œuvre de Simone Schwarz-Bart*. L'Harmattan, 1986.